# A FEW REMARKABLE ALABAMA PEOPLE I HAVE KNOWN

## By a Southern Lawyer Who Became A Mystic

THIS FIRST LITTLE BOOK IN A TRILOGY was set up by a poem, which fell out of me as fast as I could write it.

**SHANGHAIED**

*A calling to serve carries its own wisdom,*
*which legitimates both the calling and the serving*
*so that the two are one.*

*Only the one called to serve*
*can know this wisdom,*
*and for some who are called*
*the knowing comes easily,*
*while for others the knowing is a fiery baptism.*
*Each calling is different,*
*and while some callings can be declined,*
*others cannot,*
*and those whose calling is without repentance*
*know they are in it for the duration of the calling,*
*and while others may try to persuade them out of it,*
*the calling for ones such as these always prevails;*
*thus is it advised to all called for keeps*
*that they view their calling as a blessing*
*even when it seems at times to be a curse,*
*and that they try to reconcile the loss of their captain status*
*and allow the Spirit of God to man the helm of their ship,*
*and be glad and willing crew members thereon,*
*knowing that all sailing ships of souls*
*need a crew as well as a captain*
*to maintain and navigate the ship through*
*seas of many tones, depths and flavors;*
*so consider each league sailed*
*as part of the overall journey*
*going to where the captain deigns to go*
*by using whatever winds and sea currents available*
*to navigate the ship to the experiences*
*this ship and crew need to have*
*in order to fulfill their calling and its wisdom*
*revealed by the journey of many leagues,*
*many known only to the ship and its crew,*
*all of whom come to know,*
*some sooner than others, that once conscripted*
*there is no safe jumping ship.*

(7 June 2004)

# GREETINGS

THIS LITTLE BOOK OF STORIES about five large Birmingham, Alabama, people, and one from Poland via Troy, Alabama, started falling out of me, amidst much weeping, in the early fall of 2004.

Here's how this little book began:

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|---|---|
| From | sloanbashinsky@hotmail.com *[no longer valid]* |
| Sent | Thursday, September 16, 2004 4:33 PM |
| To | mecommentary@npr.ord,<br>atccommentary@npr.org,<br>sflowers@npr.org |
| Subject | commentary submission |

Dear NPR,

After a two-year hiatus, I recently had my geographic and fiscal circumstances change so that I could again listen regularly to NPR. Then late last week I heard on an afternoon NPR show a couple of commentaries about stagnated writers whose careers were rejuvenated by synchronistic experiences. The next or maybe the next afternoon, I heard a young woman read at length out of a book she had written about her public service experiences in Africa. Yesterday morning I was moved to tell a good buddy of a remarkable judge I'd once known, who was, I felt, a saint, even though he did not attend church. My friend said he hoped I would write it all down and give him and our minister a copy. I then sat down and wrote a piece that mostly wrote itself and took me into some pretty deep places. After I read it to my new landlady and new friend yesterday afternoon, and told her how it had all come about and that I was thinking perhaps of submitting it to NPR, she said that she was already thinking along those lines, and that the piece might be the first of a number of somewhat similar pieces, perhaps to make up a book. I had three non-fiction books published/handled by Simon & Shuster, several lifetimes ago, it seems. Then my writing became mostly mystical non-fiction, verse and novels, which I self-

published and mostly gave away, as I then had money for doing that. This new piece perhaps is more generally accessible. Thanks for considering it, and, even if you don't feel you can use it, for helping to inspire it.

Sloan Bashinsky

*[NPR did not respond.]*

# HE USED TO DRINK MOONSHINE

I WISH TO TELL A STORY ABOUT A WONDERFUL MAN I came to know and love, Clarence W. Allgood. No kidding, that was his real name.

I met Judge when I was still in law school, still reeling from the sudden infant death of my son, and more recently from my father and his father's stunning disapproval of my desire to return to the small south Alabama town, where they had been born and raised, to practice law with a man my father had known growing up, who also had lost a son, and who had offered me a lock-and-key law practice in his own office, use of his secretary, an office, and referring to me the many cases he then was referring to other lawyers, without asking for a dime back from me. I so wanted my father's approval, and his father's too, I suppose, that I was left on what felt like the edge of a great abyss, until a law school professor told me of a federal judge in Birmingham, my home town, who had unexpectedly had his law clerk resign and was looking for a replacement.

I wrote to the judge, got a reply back, asking me to pay him a visit, which I did right away. We mostly talked about fishing and hunting, and not much about lawyering or judging, except Judge told me he tried all the federal criminal cases in the Northern District of Alabama, and handled all appeals from the federal bankruptcy court and all appeals from denial of disability claims from the Social Security Administration, and sat on a few three-judge federal panels in special cases. I would later learn that he had invented and piloted the federal Debtor's Court right there in Birmingham. This court allowed ordinary wage earners to seek court help in consolidating their otherwise unpayable debts, and pay them off on a percentage of face value at a monthly rate they could afford. By taking a referee's commission off each case, Judge made his fortune; but upon writing the Debtor's Court law to be passed by Congress, he put into it that referees would be salaried employees and not work on commission, as he felt the commission method would lead to abuse. From there, he was appointed to the federal bench, not having practiced law a day in his life. It turned out to be a brilliant appointment, as he came to be respected by the entire federal judiciary, as far as I could tell. But there is more about this remarkable man, which had nothing to do with his being a judge, piloting the federal Debtor's Court, or going to night law school in Birmingham before that.

As a lad, Clarence developed a fondness for hopping freight trains. At about age fifteen, he was on a train he had hopped, and as it neared a place in Birmingham he wanted to get off, he jumped as he had done many times for the ground, but something happened and he tripped and his legs fell across the rails and were amputated just above the knees. To the hospital he was rushed, where he then languished in hell's despair,

wanting to die, he told me one day. Then, into his hospital room came a man he had never before seen, and this man began to belittle him for behaving in the way he was behaving. Stunned and outraged, young Clarence told the man he had a hell of a lot of nerve coming in there like that and getting on him about his attitude about losing his legs, when he, the accuser himself, had two legs on which to walk. Whereupon, this man who had come from out of nowhere did a standing two-legged jump up onto Clarence's hospital bed and reached down and raised up his britches legs, and, lo and behold, there were two wooden legs!

In time, Clarence attended Auburn, where he met a young woman named Marie, whom he began to court and found she was high-spirited and he could not boss her around but it seemed she was able sometimes to boss him around, he told me another time. So, he nick-named her "Bully," and he called her that as often as he called her Marie. I swear, Marie was as wonderful as he was, and she taught me how to cook real slow in a barbeque smoker the best leg of lamb I ever ate. I had my first taste of her lamb up at their getaway place in the country, in St. Claire country, on which Judge had had a small lake built and stocked it with blue gill and shell cracker bream, crappie, bass and channel catfish. He nursed them with fish food he threw in the lake the way a farmer might nurse a calf with a milk bottle, whose momma had died. He caught and released, mostly, but sometimes he took enough for Marie's skillet.

Every moonshiner in North Alabama knew Judge, if not from having come before him, then by hearing of him from another moonshiner who had. Judge had a fondness for moonshiners, having once had a taste for the brew himself, but he had to give it up, and drinking altogether, when he developed a digestive disorder, a hiatal hernia. I got the sense that he still missed picking up a jug every now and then, and I knew, because he told me, that he was not happy that his courtroom was used by US Treasury agents to prosecute moonshiners for not paying the federal alcohol stamp tax on their product. If they had bought the stamps, the State of Alabama would find out about it and prosecute them for making moonshine without a state license, which was not available, as no whiskey legally could be made in Alabama. When a local attorney was hired by some moonshiners to try to get the state prohibition laws declared unconstitutional in a three-judge court, on which Judge was to sit, he asked me to try to find some legal authority to support a verdict for the plaintiffs. Alas, I could not, and the case went for the State of Alabama. But nothing really changed, as Judge continued to sentence convicted moonshiners to probation, who then sent him lots of fan mail and some of them, without even being asked by anybody, took it upon themselves to patrol his farm and keep poachers off the place.

Judge had a way of putting convicted criminals into prison (bank robbers, car thieves caught taking cars across state lines, counterfeiters, etc.) that tended to gain their respect and led to him getting a lot of fan mail from them, too. He also got plenty of fan mail from their families. There were a couple of other things about Judge, which were told to me by people who knew him well. One was that he literally ran the Democratic Party in Alabama

behind the scenes. Anybody who wanted to serve as a US Senator or in the House of Representatives, or to be the US Attorney, or the US Marshall, on in the Alabama Legislature, needed to get Judge Allgood's stamp of approval. He was on intimate basis with John Sparkman, Lister Hill and Jim Allen, prominent US Congressmen. The other thing was that Judge was considered a sage, and a lot of important folks came to him in chambers seeking his counsel: lawyers, businessmen, even ministers. I heard ministers brought to Judge the parishioners they could not help, and if they did what Judge recommended, their lives got better.

When it was time for me to leave Judge, I was by then thoroughly mixed up, had contracted a terrible G.I. tract disorder, had lost my confidence, and was committed to go to work for my father's company, which his father and his father's brother-in-law had purchased from a local family just after the war, my father being a junior partner, so to speak, until he eventually learned enough to be ready to run and expand the business himself, at which time he bought out his father and uncle by marriage. Judge tried to talk me out of working for my father, said I could stay another term with him, if I wanted, but I didn't listen and it was a sad thing for both my father and me. When I gave up on that misadventure four years later, my marriage now in tatters, my psyche ready for the State Mental Hospital I often felt, Judge told me to leave Alabama, get my act together somewhere else, then come back. For if people came to believe that I had psychiatric troubles, it would go very badly for me. I ignored that advice, too, went into the practice of law, gutting out the psychic trouble and got somewhat leveled out. But many years later, after a lot of other things had happened, it all caught up with me.

I don't recall Judge ever talking to me about God but one time, which was in 1990, perhaps early 1991, before I fell apart nearly all the way, before I even knew I was going to fall apart nearly all the way. I had occasion to be in Birmingham, and I paid him a visit in chambers. He was glad to see me, wanted to talk. I was expecting something else, as the last time I'd seen him in chambers was when he had told me to leave the state back in 1973. But he must have felt I'd pulled through alright, because I'd practiced law over a decade, before leaving Alabama in 1986, for Santa Fe, New Mexico, trying to find help for my illness, which nothing I'd tried had helped: medicine, psychiatry, natural medicine, meditation, various forms of exercise, including yoga and tai chi, diets, etc. After a year in Santa Fe, I finally begged God to help me, and after that I started having experiences that were not of this world, and they've been going on ever since. It was my telling some folks once about how it all got started in Santa Fe that got me locked up and I thought maybe put away forever in early 1997. But that finality was not to be, even though the going was very rough for a good while after that.

Anyway, this story is about Judge, not about me, except to give some scruffy pedigree for the teller of this yarn that is only now getting to what I believe is the most interesting part, which begins with me in Judge's chambers in 1990. He is very upset about the Eleventh Circuit setting up so many judicial sentencing guidelines that, if followed, render a federal judge into a robot. "But you know me, I figured out a way around it, but not even

you will I tell how I do it!" he says with that crinkly smile I came to love so many years before. But after the smile leaves, I see another look in his eyes, and hear a tone in his voice, and see the tiredness and pain in his body and soul, and his loneliness: his beloved Marie had suddenly died of a stroke ten years or so before, in his arms, and since then he had lived alone. I know he is leaving.

In the meantime, a beautiful commemoration is written and published by legal folks in Birmingham, whose lives Judge has touched as much as he had touched my life. The authors call and interview many people, including past law clerks. I tell the story of the moonshiners, and some other stories I never feel they will publish, but they publish it and I am sort of the one really sticking out there. But Judge seems not to mind but is somewhat pleased by it all, after I write him to say I owe the writers one. Judge's note back says he is getting old and is worried about the state of his soul, because he used to drink moonshine, cusses and doesn't go to church. I write back, addressing him as "Clarence." I've never dared do that before now, because only God, other federal judges and a federal judge's spouse address a federal judge by first name. But something makes me do it, and then I get on him good, say after all the good he has done people, what does he mean by being worried for his soul? When he gets to the Pearly Gates, there is going to be a very large homecoming party thrown, very large. He writes back thanking me; says I always was one of his favorites (of his law clerks). I weep.

I guess it was about a year later that a friend in Birmingham calls to let me know Judge has passed on. I ask when is the funeral? A couple of days off. I say I will get a flight out the next day. I am now living near Denver, Colorado, have been since 1988. When I, by the way, ask my friend if he knows the cause of death, he says that he thinks Judge killed himself with his own .38. I think to myself something like: Just like that tough old bird: his life in the last light, his mate gone, his body giving out, he probably had a lot of physical pain, the Eleventh Circuit was trying to strip his humanity and God-given wisdom out of him, he didn't want to live out his days in a nursing home: like an old Indian brave who knew that his time had come, but who could not fall behind the tribe and let the animals have him to spare them having to look after him, he did it in a modern way.

I weep at his funeral, then go back to Colorado and write an eulogy somewhat like this one, send it to some folks in Birmingham, who had loved Judge, but hear nothing back. I had entitled the piece: JUDGE CLARENCE ALLGOOD: MY SPIRITUAL FATHER. He was a living saint, in my opinion, and in the opinion of a lot of other people, I would wager by the way they revered him. When later I asked it of him, he started coming to me in spirit visions, sometimes, and in dreams, to mentor me in difficult times and in times not difficult. I feel his presence all around me at this time, and I feel more than his presence. I hear angels singing. I see the black woman who raised me as if I were her own, even as she loved and served my white family for twenty-five years in our home, the other living saint I have known in this life. She did go to church, and there is a lot I could write about Sister Charlotte Washington, but I do not sense this is the time to do it. This is the time

to write about Brother Clarence W. Allgood, who used to drink moonshine, cussed and did not attend church.

# SHE WORKS BEHIND THE SCENES

I WISH TO TELL A STORY ABOUT A WONDERFUL WOMAN I once knew named Charlotte Washington, who was not, I don't think, a descendant of George Washington, whose name her Negro slave parents or grandparents might have taken as their own.

As I was told it, Charlotte came to our home looking for work while I was in the hospital being born. She was there waiting when my mother and I came home. She would stay there, through two moves to successively larger houses, for twenty-five years, living with us except on Thursday afternoon and Saturday night and Sunday, when she went to visit her other family in Bessemer, which lies about twelve miles westerly of Birmingham, on the road to Tuscaloosa where no Negroes attended college in those days. Except I came not to call her Charlotte, but "Cha" (Sha), as that was about all I could get my mouth around when I was a tot. And as Sloan was a pretty hefty moniker for a tot, I was called "Bash," borrowing the first four letters of my last name, which is Bashinsky. How that came about, Bashinsky, perhaps is a story to be told another time.

Cha called me "Bashlabuttons," and she loved me like I was her own. She loved my parents and my younger brother and sister like they also were her own. And my grandparents and uncles and aunts and cousins, and my friends. She cooked food so delicious, old Southern style cooking, the way the wealthy white folks had long eaten, that I was spoiled for life. Her biskits were a closely guarded secret, that is, how she made them. They weren't big and fluffy but where thin and a bit crunchy, and with a pat of butter and some honey, yummmmmmmm. She cooked greens and peas and beans the old way, with bacon and pork back. She used Crisco to slowly cook fried chicken in a black cast iron skillet; I never yet ate any other that good. She cooked roasts (standing rib, rump, we never had pot roast), ham, leg of lamb, country fried steak (made from cubed sirloin), and stewed and fresh corn and homemade rolls that were to die for. I liked leftovers, and hash from the meats, as much as the first pass at it. Her chocolate pudding and whipped cream, and boiled custard, somewhat rare treats, still linger in my mouth at age almost sixty-two. She must have known the way to a man's heart is through his stomach.

Cha also must have known that in my soul I was a fisherman, because she was the one who first taught me how to fish: cane pole, string, cork, spit-shot, safety-pin or small hook, worms or grasshoppers in fresh water, a small piece of shrimp or cut bait in salt water. It may not be stretching it to say she probably liked fishing better than I did, but she didn't get to go much when I knew her, with all the work she was doing for us: cooking, washing and ironing our clothes and bathroom and bedroom linens, and cleaning house. That was the first house, which was small. We had other Negro housekeeping help in the bigger

houses, and to take care of the yards. About all I ever did was mow the grass and sometimes weed out crabgrass, all of which I did my best to get out of doing. Somehow I had gotten the notion that white children did not do yard work. I'd gotten some related notions, too, I'm now ashamed to say.

I don't remember Cha ever preaching the Bible to me, even though she was always listening to Negro religious radio stations while she cooked and ironed, which she seemed to do most of the time except when she was sleeping. She had a schoolmarm way of tilting her head down, looking sort of up at me, hands on hips, or at her sides, saying, "Umh, umh, umh, ain't you shamed!" whenever I did something that even I knew I ought not to do. But usually I acted as if I hadn't done it, while I backed off from doing that I shouldn't be doing. Usually is wasn't all that awful, compared to some of the things I would get into when I wasn't at home, usually on weekend nights, when I was allowed to stay out until about ten o'clock. Then came the misadventures away from home, as I approached manhood, and those that came afterwards. As if Cha, where she now perches, doesn't see it all anyway. She will speak to me about it when I am there with her, and I sure do hope that she will not then threaten to leave and go to Bessemer like she sometimes did when my brother and I really gave each other and her a hard time, when our parents were out for the evening or off on a business trip. I finally got to where I didn't believe Cha, that she would go off to Bessemer and never come back, but she finally did do that, and I'll tell about that later.

In the meantime, there's more to tell about just what a wonderful presence she was in my young life. She was joyous whenever I brought home some bass or bream, but catfish she loved most. She also liked the game I shot, doves, quail, squirrels, rabbits, but would have loved a possum, which I never wanted to hunt. I never shot a deer and am now glad for it, but in those days I would have liked to notch one or two up. Nowadays I'm not even glad I shot anything, but I don't feel too bad about the fish I caught and brought home for Cha; sometimes I got to eat them but usually not, as my family was not into eating fish very much in those days. I can't say I was all that fond of fish either back then, but I sure did like catching them. If I had to do it all over again, I might never get all those increasingly fancy rods and reels, spin casting outfits and then the fly rods. I might just stick with a cane pole, and I just might make a lot of noise about Cha getting to go with me. I'm getting sentimental thinking about that.

It's difficult for me not to get sentimental about Cha. Maybe it's because in my soul I'm half Negro? Maybe I felt invisible kinship with her many children and many more grandchildren and great grandchildren out in Bessemer and down in the country in middle Alabama in a place she called "Eeps," but I later learned it was Epps. My mother told me Cha didn't know how old she really was because the census taker had come around only once every ten years. She might have been ninety-eight instead of somewhere around eight-eight when her heart finally gave out on her out there in her grandchildren's home in Bessemer. But how could I feel such kinship, when I was racially prejudiced against Negroes, didn't think they should ride at the front of buses, drink out of the same

fountains or use the same restrooms, or go to the same schools? Yes, for a brief while I was for George Wallace.

Came the freedom marchers, and fire hoses and police dogs and police with riot sticks and mace and probably tear gas. I was off in another state at a white prep school, getting ready to go to a white college, Vanderbilt, but I didn't know yet I was going there. I was not emotionally involved in what was going on in Birmingham, Selma and Montgomery, but I really was emotionally involved because I was starting to experience mixed feelings. I was sometimes remembering when I once told Cha that I would not eat what she had prepared for the hired help, when I asked about lunch. It was turnip greens, black-eyed peas, corn bread and buttermilk. It was the buttermilk that caused me to say I would not eat nigger food. I can't imagine the black arrow that shot into her heart, but my mother let me know about it pronto, and I felt so bad that I wanted to crawl into a hole and never come out.

I felt just as bad one night some years later, when I was readying to go out and discovered that I didn't have a clean dress shirt to wear and demanded that Cha get me one ready. My shirts were washed but not yet ironed. She stopped what she was doing and fetched one of my shirts out of the ironing basket and started ironing, as I impatiently stood over her and watched. The longer she ironed, the more awful I began to feel. I'd never seen her iron a shirt, or anything, except in passing. I had no clue what was involved in ironing by hand just one long-sleeve cotton dress shirt. I told her I was going out the next day and buy drip-dry shirts, and that's what I still wear to this day.

I don't feel badly, though, about all the attention Cha, and my mother, lavished on me when I would get sick and not feel like even getting out of the bed. I doubt any child ever got better nursing care, even as my father's brother, a pediatrician, came over — Leo made house calls until he retired — to look down my throat, sometimes stick me with needles, and tell them to give me dry toast and jelly and plenty of fluids until I started getting better. Sometimes I delayed getting better by saying I was sort of feeling dizzy, because there was nothing I hated worse than going to grammar school. They saw right through it, even when they let me pretend to be getting away with it, for a day or perhaps two longer than I really needed.

Then was the time when my favorite dog ever, George, a wonderful basset hound my mother had gone to New England to get and bring back on a train, got run over and killed and nobody even stopped. When I came home from school, Cha came to me and grabbed me in her arms and told me. I was so upset I went upstairs and got my .22 rifle and loaded it and made off down the road looking for the bastard that had killed George. But I didn't get really out of my bedroom — the rest of it was in my imagination — because I was so heart-broken that I couldn't hardly move. I cried and moaned and threatened and cried until Cha called Uncle Leo. My mother and father were in Colorado Springs on a business convention, and he read me the riot act, which shut me up, but it didn't stop me from wishing George was still with me. The next basset we got didn't match up to George, but when I was in law school I had one that did, until he got run over, too. That time the car

stopped, after I started yelling after it, but I was so upset over Heathcliff that I didn't really feel like loading my shotgun, but my wife, Dianne, gave him hell.

Cha saw me go through a lot of pretty awful things, but I don't know if it was any different for any other little boy in the big scheme of things. But there was one thing she saw me go through that probably wasn't exactly ordinary. I was not looking like a little boy my senior year in law school at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, after my seven-week-old son died of sudden infant death syndrome. I was a lot number then, than when George had gotten run over. I was so numb I couldn't even cry. When the funeral was over in Birmingham, I headed with Dianne for the car to go back to Tuscaloosa. But before we reached the car, Cha ambled straight to me and even before she reached me I burst in to tears so awful that I couldn't deal with it and I got into the car and somehow drove away. That night, my Uncle Leo, a man I had wanted to be my father because he loved to fish as much as I did, who had taught me some of the modern methods of doing it, called and gave me the dickens. He had no idea how many more times I would cry over the loss of that child, but I imagine Cha sort of knew.

I also will never forget when Cha cornered me and asked me to tell her what was wrong with my mother. "She's got cancer, Cha, she's dying," I said, grabbing her to me. I'd been sworn to secrecy by my mother, I was not to tell anyone who didn't already know. How could I not tell Cha when she asked? I could not not tell her, any more than I could not weep for George or for my son. Or now, maybe because I'm leading up to the parts of this story that I feel are the really important parts of it.

Cha began to decline after my mother died in 1966, more so after my son died the next year. After she went to live with her grandchildren in Bessemer, I remember going by there only once and seeing her in the big bed in the main bedroom in their not very large house, a midget house compared to the one she had left, which was my family's house. She seemed sort of delirious and didn't want me talking about her being sick. I didn't even hug her, I don't think, but I gave her family some money, maybe $20, for medicine, if she needed it; and said to let me know if she needed more. Then I headed back to Tuscaloosa. A couple or so weeks later, I was back up in Birmingham and had just gotten through playing golf at the country club all of my family belonged to, when Dianne came to pick me up and told me Cha had died. I collapsed into her arms, said I didn't think I could take anyone else I loved dying.

We came back to Birmingham a few days later for the funeral at a large Negro Baptist Church in Bessemer. Dianne and I were the only two white people in that packed church. The minister said the congregation welcomed their white brother and sister, surely knowing I was one of Cha's white children, and Dianne, too; she and Cha were very close. Only to Dianne had Cha revealed the biskit recipe, and then very begrudgingly, after I asked her who would cook me biskits after she went to be with God? Then the minister told a story I'd never heard: that "Sister Washington" had from behind the scenes led the civil rights movement in Negro churches, counseling tolerance, patience, loving their

white brothers and sisters, never stepping forward and claiming any public credit for herself.

Then it was over and time for us all to pass by the open casket, where my Cha lay in quiet repose. When I got there beside her, I wanted to jump into the casket, never let her go. At the very least, I wanted to lean over and hug her, kiss her cheek goodbye. But all I did was keep moving, out toward the front of the church where her son, Tom Dew, was already sitting on the front steps, head in hands. Tom had worked for my family around and in the house for many years. He had worked for me in Tuscaloosa. I knew him pretty well. As I sat down beside him, he wailed out, "My momma is dead, Mr. Bash, my momma is dead, what's I gonna do?!!!" He burst into tears. I burst into tears, didn't know what to tell him. I felt embarrassed, crying like that. I stopped it, patted Tom Dew on the shoulder, got up and walked with Dianne down the steps to our car. I still remember crying out when I was a little boy and Cha wasn't nearby and I was hurting about something, "I want my Cha! I want my Cha!"

It would be many years before I saw Cha again, early 1993, actually. She came to me in a stunning spirit vision, the first of a number of such visions. I am not going to describe those visions, which are indelible in my heart and I can tell every last detail if I wish. What I will tell instead is that I became convinced Sister Charlotte Washington is an angel in service to the Holy Spirit, who came to earth to live as a person. She instilled into me something I cannot describe, not so much by talking to me but mostly by simply being. The Holy Spirit has, I believe, been pretty much in charge of my spiritual journey since it consciously began in 1987, which is another story altogether. She has loaned me out to Jesus and angels to instruct, comfort, protect and refine me. But always, at a distance, if not always hands-on, She is behind the scenes, holding me to her breast, loving me, keeping me on this world from which I often have wanted so badly to leave.

Why was I was put into the stewardship of Sister Charlotte Washington, then Judge Clarence W. Allgood, about whom I wrote first when I started this writing the other day? Why was that priceless gift also given to me? Perhaps it is so someday I might write about them, as I knew them, both on this world and from heaven after they left this world. Perhaps there are other reasons I do not yet know and have not yet been told, that these two angels came down to walk among men and women, and were men and women. Perhaps it is that we are all angels, which we forget when we come to earth, and it takes the Holy Spirit using angels like Judge Clarence Allgood and Sister Charlotte Washington, working behind the scenes, to remind us of just who and what we all really are.

[*I did eventually meet and get to know somewhat one other living saint – Dorothy Sherman, who started and ran the soup kitchen in Key West*.]

# HE CALLED A SPADE A SPADE

I WISH TO TELL YOU OF MY FATHER'S OLDER BROTHER, who, when he and I first met, had just finished his residency at Duke Medical School. It was back when he entered his freshman year of medicine there that Leo's family and medical school professors discovered he was a genius. He was also the greatest fisherman in the world, as far as I was concerned later in my young life. But for now, not even six years old, I was simply in awe of a six-foot-four giant, weighing about two-hundred-forty pounds, whose hands looked to be about the size of Goose Tatum's of the Harlem Globetrotters, who could palm a basketball and a cabbage in one hand, I supposed when I saw him play in Birmingham a few years after I met Leo. I actually would see Leo palm my youngest daughter, Alice, by her bare butt and lift her high above my head squirming sort of like a baby seal when she was just home from the hospital being born, and say in his gruff laughing way, "Now that's a fine baby!

Leo was blessed with an inheritance that allowed him to practice medicine in whatever way he wished. He had patients from over the mountain, Mountain Brook and Crestline Heights, two burgs south of Birmingham where mostly rich folks would eventually congregate, or people wanting to be rich folks. That's where I grew up, and my friends. Leo and my father grew up on the Birmingham side of the mountain, in Forest Park, when that was where the rich folks lived, or folks wanting to be rich. By the time Leo got out of Duke and came home to be my and a lot of other babies and kids' doctor, the migration over the mountain was getting pretty well underway.

Actually, Red Mountain wasn't really a mountain but was merely a ridge at the tail end of the Appalachian range, where once industrialists had mined iron ore, coal and limestone to make steel in Birmingham mills. The mills closed one by one after the raw materials ran out and it became cheaper to make steel elsewhere, than to ship the raw materials from Mobile up the Warrior River to Birmingham. But long before that demise, a very large cast- iron statue of a scantily-clad Blacksmith named Vulcan was given to Birmingham by some place or folks I don't now remember, and it was erected on top of Red Mountain, over the cut where 20th Street went over the top and down into Homewood, which lay just west of Mountain Brook.

To my little boy eyes, the first time I saw Leo and heard him bellow about scarlet fever and how it and whooping cough were primary killers of children, he looked about as big as Vulcan and made about as much noise as I thought Vulcan might make if he could really talk, and I sort of wanted to migrate somewhere . . . else. For I'd already had my taste of penicillin from another doctor, when my younger brother was nearly dead from

pneumonia, while Leo was still studying to be a doctor. I was burning up with something trying to eat me alive from inside out, and they gave me the shots, too, only to later learn I had the world record case of the red measles. My brother and I didn't cross-pollinate and kill each other, and we both lived to have Leo come around from time to time when we were sickly and eyeball us and pretty well size up the situation before he even felt our throat and neck for lumps and made us stick out our tongues and get that awful wooden flat gag stick in our throat and "ahhhhhhh" shit would have been how we really felt about it if we were old enough to know such words.

I remember one day Leo came calling when I was home sick with something he figured a needle would take care of and my mother was not there but my mammy Cha was, and I decided no way was he going to stick that needle into me and I fought him tooth and nail, really a great plan, him weighing about four times what I weighed; but it was more tussle than he or I realized I had in me, and finally he nearly had to hog-tie me and was huffing and cussing, a leg over me, an arm sort of around my waist, or maybe it was my neck, when he injected me and, yep, I thought it was going to hurt like that: it was penicillin after all, if it hurt like that. But I started getting better pretty quick, maybe because I got so hot and bothered that the sudden fever of it killed off whatever it was in me that had summoned Leo to poke that needle in me in the first place, or maybe it was just the desire for him not to come back and do it again that caused me to get better.

Leo gave up on doctoring me when I was about twenty and had contracted some sort of deadly dysentery while running a summer vacation route for my father's potato chip company, Golden Flake, but I didn't yet know I had contracted some sort of deadly dysentery because the runs hadn't yet started. I was so tired that I could barely move and felt nearly dead when Leo got there, called in by my mother from a party of some kind, accompanied by another doctor I'd heard a lot about, named Keehn Berry. I'd been wanting to meet Keehn because I'd heard from Leo that he was a great fisherman, but not under such circumstances as these. I suppose Leo had ESP'd it from afar at the party, I wouldn't put it past him; or maybe he just figured this was the last time he wanted to be called at night to come see me, one of his oldest patients. He would make house calls until the day he retired, for babies and children.

Anyway, neither Keehn nor Leo had yet figured out what was wrong with me by the time they headed back to the party. The figuring out would take my throwing up and crapping all over everywhere for the rest of the night, and then for Keehn to see the wretching remains of me in his office the next morning, which was Saturday, they still worked on Saturdays in that time, for him to announce that I had dysentery and was headed for the hospital without passing Go. Shigella was the bacteria breed they assayed in the lab, and tetracycline, as I recall, was the killer drug they used on it. I was in there nearly ten days, barely able to even move until the very end of it. Keehn was an internist and taught medicine at the nearby University of Alabama Medical School. A doctor's doctor, Leo had called him. Leo never got to treat doctors, but if he had, he would have been called that, too, I imagine.

Well, I say Leo never got to treat doctors. Who knows what he and other doctors talked about privately? Or at the Birmingham Country Club, where Leo loved to play cards: gin rummy, hearts, bridge, as he chain-smoked. I always thought the cigarettes would get him, and maybe they somehow did, but that is not what I want to talk about in this moment. I want to tell a story I heard from perhaps the greatest plaintiff's lawyer the Alabama Bar ever produced, at least up to this man's departure from this world. Francis Hare told me that Leo was the greatest doctor who had ever lived, and while I already knew this might be so, I wanted to hear Francis' reasoning. It was because he had said to Leo, over a card game one afternoon, I think this was in the 19th Hole, that he had been having headaches for years and had never been able to get much relief. Leo reached out a giant paw and took off Francis' glasses and bent the stems a bit wider and put them back onto Frances' nose and said, "How's that?

Then was the time my oldest daughter, Nelle, was outside playing with neighborhood friends, and all of a sudden there was this great yelling and shrieking and in she came holding her right arm, dislocated at the elbow from some other kid swinging her around in the air holding onto her wrist. I called Leo at home, I believe it was a weekend day, and he was there in about ten minutes. Not exactly how Nelle had hoped would be the way her day went, as she also had a close association between Leo and the needle, and as he still was about as big as a grizzly bear, Nelle was not in the least disposed to him ever getting his mitts on her again. But Leo was not a bit concerned about how any child felt about him; as far as I could tell, he was only concerned about them getting well, if they were feeling poorly. He picked Nelle right up from behind, sat down in a straight-back chair with her in his lap, her little back to his giant torso, and did some sort of manipulation on her right arm, bringing her hand and forearm up to her chest and then twisting it a bit inward, I suppose. When he then asked if that didn't feel better, the grateful look on Nelle's face said she would always be glad to see Dr. Leo after that.

The only time Leo did not treat Nelle for pediatric stuff was one time he was out of town and another doctor had to cover for him and I ended up taking Nelle away from that doctor and to Children's Hospital, and the residents agreed with me that she indeed had pneumonia and they took over until Leo got back and took over, and she got better. There was one other time, not pediatric, when at age five Nelle got run over on her bicycle and nearly lost her left foot above the Achilles, and an orthopedic surgeon saved her leg. Leo said we were darn lucky Dr. David Vesley was on call that day at the hospital. I don't say that to flack other doctors, only to say what Leo said.

I mentioned in another of these little vignettes that I once had wanted Leo to be my father because he loved to fish as much as I did. Leo's two sons didn't care all that much about fishing, and many years later Leo told Rick Ruoff, a Florida Keys fishing guide friend of mine, to whom I had introduced Leo, that I should have been his son. We really did spend some close time together, bonded pretty tight, but after I went through a lot of changes, it wasn't so tight outwardly, but inwardly I still feel much the same about that gruff old bear of a man. Maybe that's where I got some of my gruffness; maybe that's why

not long ago I was told in a dream Leo had died. Twice in that same night I was told that. But then, maybe it was because he was no longer my doctor even in spirit ways, which he had done some of over the past couple of years in my dreams, to help me see things a bit differently when I was in tight places. That man sure could see, and I wonder if it will be okay to tell some stories about how well he really could see? I'll test those waters, to see how the angels who monitor me 24-7 feel as I ease into it. They have their ways of letting me know.

I believe a good place to start is a morning I chanced into Leo and his second son, Bo, also a pediatrician, at a local breakfast place one morning. After being in private practice for a few years, Bo had recently gone to work for an HMO and was feeling a great weight had lifted off him. Bo always was a more business-like doctor than had been his father, many of whose patients were from poor black, Italian, Greek and Lebanese families, who often paid Leo's doctor bills in fresh vegetables, home-baked bread, pies and cakes, and so forth. Leo made house calls in those families' homes too. Some of the mothers, especially those living over the mountain, took not to liking Leo because he was wont to tell them he was into treating babies and not mommas, and for the nervous mommas to sit down and be quiet while he examined and figured out what was wrong with the patients, that is, the babies. Sometimes he told mommas a lot sterner stuff than that: like it was their own over-heatedness that was playing out in their babies. And once I heard him tell a momma on the telephone that she had a lot of gall calling him on Sunday afternoon about her child's fever, after it had started the preceding Wednesday, and it was because of people like her that he was retiring from the practice of medicine. Then, as he figured something really was wrong with this child, he told her to meet him with the child at the hospital. Later, Leo's wife, Betty told me that the real reason Leo had retired was because he had contracted encephalitis and it had affected his memory and he was forgetting things like who was still sick, when he was supposed to see them, and so forth. So, he took himself out of the calling to which he had dedicated his life.

This morning over breakfast, Bo wants to talk about a new drug on the market that reduces fever in children and makes mommas happy and his life easier. I, now being a somewhat self-appointed expert on various forms of disease and wellness, pipe up that I think fever is what kills infections, and so why take a pill for it unless the fever is really high and putting a child at risk? As I smugly wait for Leo to nod approval, he says softly, "It's babies who couldn't make a fever that worried me." Thus ended the lesson for that day from the master who now has Alzheimer's, which breaks my heart but I suppose he doesn't suffer too much from it. Last time Leo and I had a frank talk, which was before he knew of the Alzheimer's, he said he was waiting on the Lord to take him. Why the Lord has now waited so darn long, I don't know, but I sure do hope the Lord doesn't wait much longer, even though Leo is a lot like Noah in that wonderful movie, the name of which I can't now remember [The Notebook], but Noah's wife was named Allie, and she got Alzheimer's and he moved into the nursing home with her and looked after her.

Despite being a giant, Leo was a great dancer, talked women off their feet, made them laugh, flattered them, romanced them, but never beyond play-pretend. He once told me a story, I was about twelve, as a shapely red-head crossed in front of the car he and another man and I were in, during a fishing trip for speckled trout in Pensacola Bay. The fishing was awful and the woman was striking, and the other man and Leo were both gawking, even as Leo said that once he had done something he ought not to have done and Miss Betty had told him that if he ever did that again she would wait until he was asleep one night and would get a big rusty knife out of the kitchen and slit his throat, and she really meant it, too, he said. I wonder if it really was his throat that Betty told him she would slit. I know her well enough to wonder that.

One time I got involved in doing some legal work for them, the subject matter of which I'll not get into other than to say and I was doing it for nothing, just as Leo had treated me and my brother and sister and my children for nothing; and I was doing it because I loved Leo and Betty. But eventually I let the situation get away from me; I was far too close to it, to be detached and professional, and I had to tell them to seek help from their regular lawyers and that took a while and some money but it worked out okay in the end, I hope. It would have worked out a lot better if they'd had the other lawyers to begin with, because the other lawyers would not have let them even get involved with what I let them get involved in. Betty was the leader, Leo was following, and I was tagging along, and it was during the darkest hour of it all that I heard Leo say things to Betty about how he would see it to the end, protect her interests, and he told me that he loved her (and for me to lay off her).

I have written to Leo and Betty that I do not wish to attend any funeral but would love to throw a party for whoever goes to the other side, and the one left behind and all the relatives and friends will be welcome at wherever I throw the party. Leo himself never was much for funerals: he told me he was glad his father, suffering a long time from leukemia, had finally crossed over and was now out of pain. I never heard Leo express concern about the state of his own soul, nor did I ever hear him talk about the state of anyone else's. If he liked something, he complimented it. If he didn't like something, he said so. He seemed, when I heard him speak of the Bible, to enjoy the Old Testament more than the New. He was one-quarter Jew, through is father and paternal grandfather. Like Old Testament men of God, he called a spade a spade, and some people didn't like that.

*[Leo finally crossed over in 2006, and I stayed in the Florida Keys and wrote an eulogy which left my heart heaving.]*

# HE WAS A NOBLE CREATION

I WISH TO TELL YOU ABOUT A MAN I NEVER PERSONALLY MET, as he died a few years before I was born. His name was, I hope this spelling is correct, Leopold Baczynsky, which he much later changed the spelling of to Bashinsky, to make it phonetically pronounceable in English, and also easier to spell, I would imagine. What I tell here was told to me by his relatives, in bits and pieces.

When he was fifteen, Leopold's father took his third wife, who also was fifteen. Leopold's mother and first stepmother had both died, thus the third marriage. However, being the same age as his new stepmother, Leopold decided to strike out on his own, to America. He came from Poland by ship, and came in through either the Charleston (or was it Savannah?) harbor, where he had a relative, who then helped him to move eastward to the Alabama-Georgia line, to where there was another relative. After hanging out there for a while, Leopold migrated further eastward to Troy, Alabama, where he found employment with a Mr. Frederick Fox Henderson, I believe was the gentleman's name, as his son and grandson bore the same name, I knowing the great grandson eventually.

Mr. Henderson owned a mercantile store and Leopold started out stocking shelves and sweeping the place out in the evenings. This went on for a while, even as Leopold learned the business from the bottom up and eventually, perhaps in his early twenties, was managing the entire business. The business prospered under Leopold's stewardship, and one day he went to Mr. Henderson and said he thought they should open a bank. Well, Mr. Henderson said he didn't know anything about banks. Leopold said, well, they were already pretty much a bank, loaning out three dollars to a lot of folks on Fridays, and they would bring back four dollars the next Friday. There couldn't be much more to it than that, Leopold opined. And he knew where there was banking school, lasted six months, up in St. Louis, I believe it was, although another relative said the school was in Montgomery. So, Mr. Henderson sent Leopold to the banking school.

In three months, Leopold was back, having completed the school, and he opened the bank. Mr. Henderson told Leopold that he wanted him to be the president, but Leopold said, no, it was Mr. Henderson's bank and he would be the president and he, Leopold, would be the vice-president and run it for Mr. Henderson. That's what happened, as I myself once saw a dollar bill on that bank signed by Leopold as "v-president." And that's when Leopold's real gifts began to come forth. For the townspeople found he was honest and they came to trust his judgment. In time, Leopold became the town mediator and arbitrator. Folks who had disagreements went together to see him, having agreed in

advance that whatever he said would be fair, they would abide by it. The town lawyers were nearly put to just writing up wills and contracts and deeds.

Then came the troubles on the horizon that Leopold saw in the late 1920s could cause banks and a lot of folks serious trouble. He traveled to banks in nearby counties and got those bankers to agree, if one of their banks had a run on it, the other banks would come to that bank's aid. That way, they might all be able to stay open and in business. But as fate had it, the first run, of sorts, came to Henderson Bank, when a wealthy farmer and landowner came into town one day and into the bank and right there in the lobby loudly bellowed out that he wanted all his money because he didn't trust this or any other bank! There were a few local citizens in the bank, and the ears were listening and the tongues set on ready to wag, which Leopold knew when he came out of his office and greeted his biggest customer and depositor and told him, no problem, he would get his money but it would take a little while to count it all out. Did he have other errands to run in town? Yes, the man said. Could he go off and do that and come back in about an hour, and then pick up his money? Sure, the man said.

An hour later, the man returned to a bank now surrounded by most of the people in Troy, who had come to see what was going to happen. Many of them also were depositors in Henderson Bank. And then before them, through the front door onto the marble steps leading up to the bank, came Leopold carrying two large leather money bags, the kind you see in stage coach and bank robberies in old western movies, I imagine, and dropped them at the feet of the wealthy farmer and said, "There's all your money, in gold. Do you wish to count it?" The jingle and jangle left no doubt in anyone there's mind that there really was a lot of gold coin in those two bags.

The wealthy farmer's mind was one of those minds, as he already was thinking that maybe this was not such a good idea after all, him hauling all that gold back to his farm, with everyone there knowing he was hauling all of that gold back to his farm, to be put somewhere that somebody might decide to come looking for it and take it somewhere that nobody would ever think to look for or find it. So the wealthy farmer said he didn't want gold but wanted paper money instead. Now, that's not going to work, Leopold said, because this and all other banks issue our own paper money, which is how it was done back in those days, and they backed it with gold that was deposited. This depositor had just stripped the Henderson Bank of all its gold reserves, but Leopold had not mentioned that, not wanting to create a riot and stampede.

Cool-handed as Luke, whom Leopold would never get to know, as he died in 1940, I think it was, Leopold told the wealthy farmer, if he did not trust the Henderson Bank, he could not trust the Henderson Bank's paper money. So please take the gold and go. Well, now, the wealthy farmer suddenly really did have himself a predicament, didn't he? And he tried to get out of it by offering the gold back to Leopold, who politely declined to take it back. Now that really set the wealthy farmer to squirming in his boots, and maybe he was squirming in other ways too. He now is begging Leopold to take the gold back, and Leopold is politely declining, and finally the poor man, defeated, leaves on his wagon with

his gold. But he does not give up, as he comes back every day trying to get Leopold to take the gold back, and every day Leopold politely declines, and, of course, nobody else is asking for their money to be given back in gold. And when he senses it is time, Leopold finally does relent and takes back the wealthy farmer's gold, and it may have been said to me that Henderson Bank was the only bank in Alabama that did not go bust during the ensuing Great Depression. Not bad for a Pollock, but then, Leopold was a Jew.

At that time, probably the only Jew inside a fifty-mile radius, even though his brother, Max, or maybe Max was a cousin, would eventually come to Troy. I'm a big foggy about Max, as he seems not to have been spoken of much when I was listening. But I did hear that Leopold learned one day that a woman in town had called off her engagement to a man from out of state, and Leopold went calling and asked if he could court her and she agreed to it. Her father had fought in the Great Waw, that is, the Waw Between the States, that is sometimes called the Waw of Northern Aggression, but never the Civil War. Never the Civil War. Many years later, as I sat at her big dining room table one Sunday dinner (noon meal), eating fried chicken, cooked and served by a Negro servant, my great grandmother Elizabeth Burford Bashinsky asked me, "Sloan (nobody but her called me Sloan, my nickname was "Bash"), do you know why southern people eat our friend chicken with our fingas?" "No, Grandmother," I said, not having ever given it a moment's thought that there might be yet another way to eat fried chicken. "It's because the God-damn Yankees came down here and stole all our silverware and then we didn't have anything to eat our fried chicken with but our fingas!" Maybe that's when I understood why she was carving her fried chicken up with a knife and fork, which I viewed as about as bad as the Yankees coming down and stealing the silver to begin with. Meaning, I still eat my fried chicken with my fingas.

Well, it turned out Elizabeth's Baptist family were a bit relieved that she wanted to marry Leopold, because she was about thirty by now and they were ascair't maybe she wuz gonna ends up a spinst'r en not gib dem no gran' babies, even iffen's dey did knos sumtin' bout birthin' babies. And three children they had together, my grandfather, Leo, and two daughters, Mary Elizabeth and Helen. Mary Elizabeth would come to be called Mary Eve, or just Mary E, and she would marry a wonderful man from Montgomery, I believe he was from there, named Noble Crump. They lived in Montgomery and had their three children there, Elizabeth, Jane and Helen, actually a generation older than I, thus second cousins, I think it is; but I call them my aunts to get their goats, as Helen, at least, is a couple of years junior to me.

The Crumps were the major source of much of this tale telling about Leopold, such as him going Sundays to the Baptist Church on College Street in Troy, where Leopold and Elizabeth had built their somewhat antebellum looking home, with marble steps leading up to the great white pillars; just imagine how that would have impressed the folks back home in Poland. Leopold was said to sit in the back pew, listening to the service, but it was not said that he converted. What was said, however, was when it came time for their children to start receiving their own religious training, Elizabeth asked Leopold about his

sentiments and he said he thought they should be raised Christian, and that's what happened. Today, there is little talk in my family about our Jewish heritage. For all I know, I'm the only one who perhaps hangs any stock in it. How could I not hang stock in a bloodline from someone like Leopold, who sometimes comes to me and advises me how to deal with stuff?

The great tragedy came when Helen, Leopold and Elizabeth's third daughter, Helen, married a wonderful man, Cyrus Case, but not too long later she contracted a virulent pneumonia, or perhaps it was tuberculosis, and perished very quickly. The entire family was struck something awful in the heart, and Leopold's wife, Elizabeth, declared a year of mourning for the family, she and her daughter dressing in black, not going anywhere except for the absolute necessary things, and church. But before the year was out, Leopold could take no more and he grabbed up the entire family and took them on a ship to Europe, to break the spell. I don't know if the spell was broken completely, probably wasn't. I lost my first child and only son suddenly, in 1967, and that spell isn't completely broken yet, and it's 2004. I may write about that another time, but for now, I wish to finish telling you about Leopold.

Actually, there isn't all that much more to tell, except when I went to his wife's funeral in Troy in March 1968, she was perhaps one hundred and four years old. I was then planning to move to Troy to practice law with a highly respected Alabama lawyer, Pi Brantley, with whom my father and grown up in Troy, before his father, Leo, Leopold's son, had decided to move to Birmingham. That migration, too, might another story be. Here, though, I'll only say that my own migration back to Troy all fell though at the funeral, when my father and grandfather got very upset with Pi and me for what I was about to do. But because of that, I would soon meet another noble man, Judge Clarence W. Allgood, and become his law clerk, about which I have already scribbled down a few words.

It was there, at graveside, that I saw Leopold's grave stone, on which an epitaph had been inscribed, by his wife, I would later learn: "God's noblest creation is an honest man."

As I sit here sort of dumbstruck, I'm wondering if Leopold had something to do with my meeting Clarence? Wouldn't put it past them.

# HE WAS A PARISH PRIEST

I WISH TO TELL YOU TODAY ABOUT AN EPISCOPAL PRIEST who came into our burg south of Birmingham, Alabama when I was about eleven years old, which would make it sometime around 1953. I don't know where Lee Graham came from, or even if he'd had another church before that. Even then, he did not have exactly what folks in those days would call a church. What he had was an old farmhouse on the edge of Crestline Village's "business" district, where the city library now stands across the side street from City Hall and the Police and Fire Departments. Sometimes friends of mine and I used the crawl space under that old farm house to hide after we had set off a big string of firecrackers beside the fire and police stations, to watch the firemen and policemen come out and just stand there watching what none of them were about to do anything about but let it run its course.

Anyway, I remember going to this old farm house one Sunday with my mother, who, as I recall, said she was very impressed with this young minister who had come into our community. I don't remember anything about the service, and never would remember much about the services at that age, as I had been raised Baptist and was attending only Sunday school, which I enjoyed because we talked about stuff I seemed to understand. I only think I went to one or two church services at Mountain Brook Baptist Church on Montevallo Road, a couple of blocks from where we lived in our second house. I didn't like those services either. I don't know how it was for other boys, but this boy didn't like sermons and church announcements, and he didn't even like the singing all that much either.

My mother was so taken by Lee Graham that she finally decided to switch her membership from the Baptist Church to St. Luke's, which was what Lee called his little farm house church. I don't know what he was doing, but I know it wasn't long before that little farm house wasn't big enough and they moved the whole kit n' kabuddle over to what I believe had been another church on Church Street, which was and still is the street that runs through the middle of the Crestline Village's business district. It was about then that my mother switched my own church membership to St. Luke's, and while already the protests from the family and the Baptist Church were pretty strong and loud, as I recall, they now got a whole lot stronger and louder. Yet my mother was determined to hold her course, and that's how she, my younger brother and sister and I became Episcopalians, even though in my heart I suppose I am still at least half Baptist, because I still like Sunday School. [Later, I got over liking Sunday School.]

I don't know if Lee still is on this world, somewhere down near Tallahassee. That's where he went after he told my mother, she told me, that he had achieved his purpose at St. Luke's. I wasn't directly privy to any of what I'm about to say, as it all was told to me by my mother, who was devoted to Lee and St. Luke's, served faithfully on the Altar Guild and even was in charge of it one year, as I recall. I always felt it was her hope that I would become an Acolyte, which I steadfastly refused to do, perhaps because I had not wanted to be confirmed in the first place. I had wanted to be playing baseball and going fishing those spring Saturday afternoons of my twelfth year, instead of learning the Ten Commandments, liturgies and catechisms. I have also suspected that my mother wanted me to be an Episcopal priest. Regardless of whether any of that is true, I know it really bothered her that I stopped expressing any interest in church for many years, and that I was not much of a church-goer when she passed away when I was twenty-three, during my second year in law school. Even so, maybe she got more done back then than she had believed, because the few stories I'm now about to tell about Lee Graham, which she told to me, left an indelible mark deep in my heart.

The first story was about the time of year, my Mom said, when all Episcopal priests were required by the Diocese to preach a sermon on tithing to the Church. Mom said Lee hated more than anything preaching that sermon, and when he preached it, I heard him say he didn't like doing it. It was the only thing I remember about any sermon he preached. I would conjecture, as it seems unlikely that there could be any other reason for it: Lee felt if he did God's work, then God would provide the money to support it. Shoot, tears just came to my eyes. St. Luke's congregation was generously supporting their church, because, I would again conjecture, they felt their pastor was feeding their souls. And darn, there go some more tears trying to come out of my eyes. In fact, they got to be so many people in the congregation, and some of them were somewhat wealthy, it being a part of Mountain Brook, that they built a much larger church down the other side the hill from where Montevallo Road crosses Church Street just above Crestline Height's Elementary School, where I went for eight years. Across Montevallo, Church Street becomes Montrose Road, and down about a half mile, at the curve at the bottom of a ridge, is where the new church, a rather big church, was built and still stood last time I was by there in 1999. I believe it was around this time that my mother started telling me that she thought Lee Graham would be the next Bishop of the Alabama Diocese.

It wasn't all that long after the new big church was built that the freedom marches and sit-in's began, and Negroes started just showing up at some white churches for Sunday service. St. Luke's congregation was all white. Most of the Vestrymen had started out, I suppose, over at the old farm house, and had walked a lot of miles with Lee. The question arose during a Vestry meeting about what St. Luke's would do if Negroes came on Sunday to attend church? Lee was there observing. It was finally agreed they would hire off-duty Mountain Brook police officers to stand out front and turn away any Negroes who came for Sunday service. That agreed, they were about to adjourn, my mother said to me, when Lee asked the Vestry if they were interested in his thoughts on

the matter? Well, er, yeah, perhaps they should hear his thoughts on the matter. Well, he said his thoughts on the matter where he had built this church up from scratch, he had put his life and soul into it, and if they did not let Negroes come into St. Luke's and worship, then he would close the church and resign as their minister. Darn, there are some more of those tears trying to get aloose from my eyes. So, the Vestrymen backed off from what they had just agreed to do. As it turned out, no Negroes I ever heard of came to St. Luke's. Even so, a deep rift had occurred, and it wasn't all that long, maybe a couple of years, before my mother told me Lee had told her he had accomplished what he had set out to do and was taking a small parish near Tallahassee.

My mother passes away, cancer takes her not all that long, as time goes, after Lee went to Tallahassee. My father has Lee flown up to Birmingham, to do the graveside service. I don't remember a word Lee says, as I am numb and wondering what is wrong with me that I cannot even cry for my own mother's passing? The truth, I think, I was upset with her, but I didn't yet know I was upset with her. It all seemed such a waste: she was only forty-five, I think it was, when she left us. She had more friends than you could shake a stick at. All my own friends and my brother and sister's friends viewed her as their own special friend. They are terribly upset over her passing; shocked might be a better word. Yet there I sit in the family row at gave side, as Lee says last words I will never remember about my mother. He doesn't smile, nor do I recall ever having seen him smile. As he comes down through the family, shaking hands with my father and brother, hugging my sister, I am looking down, preoccupied with what I cannot comprehend. So he passes me by, saying nothing, perhaps the strongest thing he can ever say to me. Well, here come some more tears.

I can't say it, except through conjecture, but I wonder if Lee had sensed for some time that he really wasn't cut out to have a big congregation, if perhaps he was really a simple parish priest, who didn't have to deal with high finances and politics, and was supported by a small congregation, and the Diocese when extra fiscal help was required? Why do tears keep coming to my eyes, as I write about this man I hardly knew? Why do I only really feel home in an Episcopal nave, while in other churches I feel like I am merely a visitor? Why do I miss the old Episcopal Liturgy and not feel much of anything when the new Liturgy is used? Why do I suddenly feel Lee has been with me in spirit ever since I first laid eyes on him and he stared right into my soul?

Maybe I have answered the question so many people once asked about why my mother left the Baptist Church to go to church in an old farmhouse in Crestline Village. Maybe I have answered the question of why I feel the strong presence of God anytime I attend an Episcopal service, and usually have a sort of special private service that parallels the one it seems everyone else is having. Maybe I have answered the question of why I have a sort of private service even when I go into an Episcopal Church during off hours and just sit there quietly until something happens. Maybe Lee Graham is there, waiting on me. Maybe those were Jesus' eyes staring through him at me, causing these tears to keeping trying to get out of me.

# WHAT YOU SAW WAS WHAT YOU GOT

I WISH TO TELL YOU TODAY ABOUT A LAWYER who represented my family for many years. It was said John Gillon just showed up one day in Birmingham, Alabama, at the law firm where Frank Spain was practicing law. Frank had grown up in Troy, Alabama, with my Grandfather Leo Bashinsky and a kid named Frank Samford, who one day would buy a small life insurance company out of receivership up in Pennsylvania, I think it was, and move that firm to Birmingham.

I don't know whether that was before or after John Gillon talked Frank Spain into giving him office space and use of the law firm's library, in return for his doing some legal work for the firm. But what do know is, eventually, John became a senior partner in the firm and it represented Liberty National Life Insurance Company through its meteoric rise in value under Frank Samford's stewardship. Today, Liberty National is a wholly owned subsidiary of Torchmark Corporation, which, I believe, still has the best earnings record of any company listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Its common stock is the foundation of my family's wealth.

John Gillon eventually was invited to become a member of the law firm. The way the story went, Frank Spain and another partner, perhaps it was Hobart Grooms, who later would become a United States District Judge in Birmingham, were discussing a case in the hallway of the law firm. Apparently, there was some legal issue they did not have an answer for. In that moment, a voice wafted from out of what lawyers call "the stacks," which are the long, tall shelves of law books found in law firms and law school libraries. The voice said something like, "I believe you can find the answer to that question in . . ." Now, not only did the voice name the case, say it was Johnson v. Baker. The voice also gave the legal reporter in which the case could be found, and the precise volume and page number, say,15 Alabama Reports 237. That's precisely where Frank Spain and the other lawyer found the answer to the legal question they were discussing. I doubt John Gillon forgot anything he ever read or heard spoken, and he read and heard a lot. For him, the law was a life calling, his jealous mistress.

I have written elsewhere that my first child and only son died of sudden infant death syndrome in 1967, during my senior year in law school. One of the things that happened during the aftermath, which I also wrote earlier, was that I lucked into what sure seemed to me and a few other people like a sweetheart deal with a well-respected lawyer in Troy, where my Bashinsky ancestors lived before my Grandfather Bashinsky moved his family to Birmingham in the 1920s, I think it was. My grandfather and father were not in favor of my Troy plans, and, in an effort to help me see more clearly, my father suggested I visit

with John Gillon, who had grown up in a small town, and see what he might have to say about living in a small town.

That seemed like good advice, so a few days later I went to Spain-Gillon's offices in the John Hand Building on the corner of 20th Street and 1st Avenue North. The John Hand Building used to be the main office of what then was First National Bank of Birmingham, which today is known as AmSouth Bank. John Hand had either been the original founder of the bank, or pretty close to it. This was the bank that enjoyed the Bashinskys' banking business, it was the trustee under the various trusts John Gillon had drawn up for the benefit of my Grandfather Bashinsky's grandchildren and great grandchildren, and some day it would administer the estates of my Grandfather Bashinsky and his wife, Cora, after they left this world. And I believe Spain-Gillon then did some legal work for First National.

John suggested we go into the library to chat. Perhaps it was all set up, perhaps it just happened, but suddenly most of the lawyers in the firm were sitting around that long library table with John and me. I knew them, more or less, and two of them had been in my law school class at Alabama. John pulled out his pipe, stuffed in some tobacco, and lit and puffed it, before looking at me with those steely, twinkly eyes and saying, "I understand you want to practice law in a small town?" I said that was my plan. His next remark was, "Do you know what it's like to live in a small town?" I said I did not, as I'd never lived in one. (I do now). "Well, he said, with a now mischievous grin, "All you have to do is go out to the golf course on Saturday night and drive around it to find out who's fucking whose wife."

Now you probably don't know, because I probably haven't said it straight out yet, but the death of our son had caused some difficulties between my wife and me, and it was a flat out truth that I was actively entertaining my getting to know some of the women in Troy on an intimate basis after I got there. John stared into my eyes, as if he knew just what I was thinking about, and not another word was said by him, or by me. However, there is something else you probably don't know, because I probably haven't said it yet either. John was a dedicated Christian, Bible scholar and churchman. For him to say something like that to anyone was a bit beyond the pale, I certainly thought in that moment. But perhaps I didn't know him yet, and perhaps even his law firm were as taken by surprise as I, but not for the same reasons, as I sure as hell wasn't letting on that I'd just had my hide nailed to a barn door. But what happened was, the entire lot of them burst out into riotous laughter, as if it was the funniest thing they had ever heard said.

Maybe it was later that same day when I asked John privately if Spain-Gillon had an opening for a lawyer fresh out of law school. He said he would check with the firm and get back to me, but when he called a few days later, it was to say they were not then looking for a new lawyer. So, I was left sitting between Troy and nowhere in particular law firm, until a law professor told me about a federal judge in Birmingham having just had his law clerk resign unexpectedly. As I already wrote to begin this series of stories, that is how I came to know Judge Clarence W. Allgood, one of the three United States District Judges

in Birmingham. Hobart Grooms was another one, and Seybourne Lynne was the third. They all three seemed to take me under their wing, even as about two or three weeks into my appointment with Judge Allgood, John Gillon called me on the telephone in my law clerk office and said something had changed and now Spain-Gillon needed another lawyer, and was I interested? I was tempted, but I'd only just gotten started with Judge Allgood, he'd already suddenly lost a law clerk just before me, and I declined the offer. It was a few years before I wondered to myself if my grandfather and father might not have had something to do with something changing in Spain-Gillon: like maybe one or both of them suggested to John Gillon maybe the law firm might consider hiring me on. It was a fact Spain-Gillon not only handled all the Bashinskys' personal legal work, they also represented my father's company. Golden Flake might then have been the firm's largest client.

One of Spain-Gillon's young lawyers at that time, John McKleroy, had been in my law school class, and some years later would be in my tax law school class. Between his two stints in law school, John McKleroy was trained by John Gillon. That training probably began in earnest after my father decided that he wanted to take Golden Flake public around 1970. Spain-Gillon had never handled a public offering, but said it wanted to do it. After my father agreed, John Gillon gave it to John McKleroy, who surely started from scratch, because Spain-Gillon had never done this before and there were no securities courses in law school while we were there. The offering seemed to go off well, but later it was discovered by John McKleroy that something had been overlooked, I'm not now sure what it was but it was significant and a lot seemed at stake. John Gillon put it all face-up on the table with my father and said Spain-Gillon would take care of it on its dime. And it was taken care of. John McKleroy now represents all of my father's myriad legal interests, and the interests of some of my other relatives, while other members of Spain-Gillon represent even other relatives. And Spain & Gillon remains Golden Flake's (now Golden Enterprises') corporate counsel. But perhaps I get ahead of myself, so let me go back in time and tell you of yet another short but sweet sermon.

It was around 1982. I had almost given up on the general practice of law, which I had entered in 1973, after working four years for Golden Flake. I was in poor health and was stumbling around in general. Downtown around noon one day, I dropped into John's Restaurant on 21st Street, between 2nd and 3rd Avenues North. A popular New Orleans and Greek-style sea food cuisine, John's also served plate lunches, meat and two or three veggies, cornbread and rolls, tea or coffee, for about five bucks. There was a special table where only lawyers sat, just dropping in for lunch and chewing the fat. John Gillon and some men I did not recognize were sitting at their own table, which suggested they probably were not just chewing the fat.

When I went over to say hi to John, he said he wanted to see me about something, could I come by his office? Sure, I said, I'd come by. Wow, what could that be? I let my imagination run pretty good with it. I should have known better. When I dropped in on John a few days later, he said, "You're never going to be happy until you find God. That's

all I wanted to say to you." We then talked about different things that were on my mind but probably didn't have anything to do with what John had just speared me with. Finally, John pulled out a Zondervern Bible, my first inkling that such a Bible was even in existence, and showed it to me. It seemed to interest him a great deal, making fine distinctions between English and Greek translations.

I believed in God, always had. But for me the Bible was an arcane law book, written for people in another time, even as it seemed to threaten to upend me and other people in this time. Church didn't appeal at all to me. I felt a lot closer to God in my vegetable garden, paddling white-water rivers with friends, writing, and stalking bonefish on the flats in the Florida Keys, alone, with my second wife, Jane, and with our fishing guide friend, Rick Ruoff. I felt a lot closer to God junking with Jane, helping her with her artwork, going with her to out of town art shows, hanging out and fishing at her family's lake property in Blount County, half-way to Oneonta from Birmingham, near the communities of Allgood, Remlap and Palmer. (Remlap is Palmer spelled backwards). I felt a lot closer to God when I was with my daughters. Sometimes I felt a lot closer to God when I was with other family members. I had never felt close to God practicing law. I knew in my bones John was correct, but didn't know what to do about it.

I don't remember having much dealing with John after that fated day. However, I do remember hearing his wife had died and he had eventually remarried at the ripe young age of about eighty-five. I also remember, after the young lawyers in his law firm decided they wanted to purchase and restore an old building on 2nd Avenue North, just east of 21st Street for their modern law office, John was said to have squawked a bit, but then went along. I also remember seeing his office in the new law firm; he wasn't there at that time. It looked just like his office at the old location: he still had his old wooden desk and wooden swivel chair, the same metal and wooden bookshelves, the same green visor, to keep the glare off the law books he read as voraciously as ever. It as if time had outwardly stood still for John Gillon, the lawyer, while inwardly he surely was still the one lawyer I would want representing me in just about anything I might need a lawyer for, even it was not an area in which he had practical expertise. He had native expertise, no matter what area of the law he was in, and I saw it proven time and time again.

Many times, things would happen to Golden Flake that would cause most people or businesses to file a lawsuit. However, nearly every time that happened, John told my father not to file a lawsuit, but to try to work it out, and if that didn't get it taken care of, then to let it go. This scenario came about most often when a shortage of potatoes developed and the price of spuds shot straight up through the roof. Some farmers would bolt their potato contracts entered into before the growing season had begun, and sell their potato crops to the highest bidder. Some of these farmers had been bailed out in other years, when there had been a surplus crop and spud prices had plunged, but Golden Flake had not gone shopping for the lowest offers and had honored the contracts. Mounted over doorways in Golden Flake's offices and lunch rooms are large golden rulers, on which are written, "Do unto others as you want done unto you."

There were only two times known to me, when John Gillon was prepared to litigate. The first time actually resulted in litigation, after another company came into Birmingham selling "Golden Flake" bread. The natural assumption in the average person's mind was this bread company was part of the Golden Flake "Potato Chip Company," which was a household name and product in Birmingham and Alabama. John invoked the federal trademark and unfair competition laws in the local United States District Court, and Golden Flake ended up collecting treble damages, as I recall the story.

The other time was after I had clerked for Judge Allgood in 1968-69, and now was working for Golden Flake. We had started making our own corn chips because potatoes were about ninety-percent water and it was very good to get fifteen pounds of potato chips out of a hundred pounds of whole potatoes, after all the water was boiled out of the sliced raw potatoes and a little oil was absorbed in the cooking process. Whereas, a hundred pounds of dry corn might produce about one hundred and fifteen pounds of corn chips after oil absorption. Hoping to cash in on Fritos' corn chip franchise with consumers, we had designed our corn chip packaging to sort of resemble Fritos corn chip packaging. By and by, Frito-Lay's lawyers wrote a low-key letter, saying Frito-Lay had done some market research in Montgomery, Alabama grocery stores, and the market research indicated Golden Flake Corn Chips packaging so resembled Fritos Corn Chips packaging that confusion was resulting in the market place. A meeting at Golden Flake's Birmingham offices was requested, to discuss resolving this confusion.

Frito-Lay had come about by virtue of Lay's Potato Chips jobbing Fritos Corn Chips for many years. Although Frito was larger than Lay's, Herman Lay owned all of his company and ended up with more stock in the merged company than anyone else, and thus became its chairman of the board. My father, perhaps the shrewdest investor on this planet, according to some people who perhaps ought to know, then purchased a large amount of Frito-Lay's common stock, hedging his bet on his own company. That hedge would prove very profitable some years later, when Pepsi-Cola and Frito-Lay merged, and Herman Lay ended up being Chairman of the Board of PepsiCo. No doubt, my father's position in Frito-Lay common stock was known to Frito-Lay's attorneys when we all sat down that day to discuss the corn chip package confusion we were said to be creating in the market place.

It all boiled down to the fact that Fritos Corn Chips had a familiar slanted red bar across the top of its packaging, in the middle of which slanted red bar was a red oval, over which was written "Fritos" in white letters. For all of its products — potato chips, cheese curls, pork skins, popcorn, peanuts, snack crackers and so forth — Golden Flake used a familiar red slanted bar across the top of its packaging, in the middle of which slanted red bar nestled a golden potato chip, over which was written Golden Flake in red letters. Frito-Lay's lawyers wanted Golden Flake to remove the slanted red bar from its corn chip packaging, and, of course, Golden Flake did not wish to do that.

Sometime before this meeting, John Gillon had asked us to round up all available photos of Golden Flake packaging and trucks that could be found. The photos showed this

very same slanted bar and logo had been featured on all Golden Flake packaging and route and transport trucks since the 1920s, which predated Fritos going into business. After showing the photo album to Frito-Lay's lawyers, John said, if there was any confusion in the market place, Fritos had caused it way back when, by choosing a logo similar to Golden Flake's. Therefore, Frito-Lay could stop the confusion by redesigning its corn chip packaging.

The matter was settled when Golden Flake agreed to slightly change the coloration of its corn chip packaging, and instead of using opaque packaging, it would use packaging with a clear window that allowed the corn chips to be seen. Golden Flake had always used windowed packaging, except it had not done so with corn chips because Fritos had set the national standard by using opaque packaging for corn chips. After going to the windowed packaging, Golden Flake's corn chip sales increased because some consumers liked to see what they were getting. It was that way also with John Gillon: what you saw was what you got.

So now comes, I sense, the moment of truth. I see John Gillon before me. He's puffing that same old pipe, sitting in that same old wooden swivel chair beside that same old wooden roll top desk. He's looking straight into me. He's wanting to know if I'm now ready to take an entry-level position in my Father's law firm. This time I'm saying yes, and here come the tears.

# Postscript

A DEVOUT CHRISTIAN BIRMINGHAM FRIEND who read the last story asked me if I ever went to work for my father's law firm? I told him to note the spelling of Father in the last paragraph. For others, perhaps the "Shanghaied" poem, which set up this little book falling out of me, explains it better.